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THE

SLEEPING SENTINEL.

BY

FRANCIS DE HAES JANVIER.

AUTHOR OF "THE SKELETON MONK," "THE VOYAGE OF LIFE,"
"THE PALACE OF THE CÆSARS," AND OTHER POEMS.

PHILADELPHIA:
T. B. PETERSON & BROTHERS,
306 CHESTNUT STREET.

PRICE 10 CENTS.



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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE.

THE incidents here woven into verse relate to William Scott, a young soldier from the State of Vermont, who, while on duty as a sentinel at night, fell asleep, and, having been condemned to die, was pardoned by the President. They form a brief record of his humble life at home and in the field, and of his glorious death in defence of the Union.

This Poem was first read on Monday, January 19th, 1863, by Mr. James E. Murdoch, the celebrated elocutionist, to a select circle at the Executive Mansion, in the presence of the President and Mrs. Lincoln. On the evening of the same day he read it in the Senate Chamber of the United States, which was specially appropriated for the purpose,—the President and Mrs. Lincoln being again present, together with one of the

largest and most distinguished audiences ever assembled in Washington. It was presented on this occasion anonymously, and produced a profound sensation.

On the evening of February 5th, 1863, Mr. Murdoch read it, with a similar result, at the American Academy of Music, in Philadelphia, to more than three thousand persons, and then announced the name of the author. He has also read it, with the same success, in Baltimore, Albany, Boston, and other cities.

It is now published, in compliance with a general desire for its circulation.

*"The quality of mercy is not strain'd;
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven,
Upon the place beneath : it is twice bless'd ;
It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes :
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest ; it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown :
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings ;
But mercy is above this sceptred sway,
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself ;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice."*

SHAKSPEARE.

THE SLEEPING SENTINEL.

'TWAS in the sultry summer-time, as War's red
records show,

When patriot armies rose to meet a fratricidal
foe—

When, from the North, and East, and West, like
the upheaving sea,

Swept forth Columbia's souls, to make our country
truly free.

Within a prison's dismal walls, where shadows
veiled decay—

In fetters, on a heap of straw, a youthful soldier
lay:

Heart-broken, hopeless, and forlorn, with short and
feverish breath,
He waited but the appointed hour to die a culprit's
death.

Yet, but a few brief weeks before, untroubled with
a care,
He roamed at will, and freely drew his native
mountain air—
Where sparkling streams leap mossy rocks, from
many a woodland font,
And waving elms, and grassy slopes, give beauty
to Vermont!

Where, dwelling in an humble cot, a tiller of the
soil,
Encircled by a mother's love, he shared a father's
toil—
Till, borne upon the wailing winds, his suffering
country's cry
Fired his young heart with fervent zeal, for her to
live or die.

Then left he all:—a few fond tears, by firmness
half concealed,

A blessing, and a parting prayer, and he was in
the field—

The field of strife, whose dewes are blood, whose
breezes War's hot breath,

Whose fruits are garnered in the grave, whose
husbandman is Death!

Without a murmur, he endured a service new and
hard;

But, wearied with a toilsome march, it chanced one
night, on guard,

He sank, exhausted, at his post, and the gray
morning found

His prostrate form—a sentinel, asleep, upon the
ground!

So, in the silence of the night, aweary, on the
sod,

Sank the disciples, watching near the suffering Son
of God;—

Yet, Jesus, with compassion moved, beheld their
heavy eyes,
And, though betrayed to ruthless foes, forgiving,
bade them rise !

But God is love,—and finite minds can faintly
comprehend
How gentle Mercy, in His rule, may with stern
Justice blend ;
And this poor soldier, seized and bound, found
none to justify,
While War's inexorable law decreed that he must
die.

"Twas night.—In a secluded room, with measured
tread, and slow,
A statesman of commanding mien, paced gravely
to and fro.

Oppressed, he pondered on a land by civil discord
rent;

On brothers armed in deadly strife:—it was the
President!

The woes of thirty millions filled his burdened
heart with grief;

Embattled hosts, on land and sea, acknowledged him
their chief;

And yet, amid the din of war, he heard the plaint-
ive cry

Of that poor soldier, as he lay in prison, doomed
to die!



'Twas morning.—On a tented field, and through
the heated haze,

Flashed back, from lines of burnished arms, the
sun's effulgent blaze;

While, from a sombre prison-house, seen slowly to
emerge,
A sad procession, o'er the sward, moved to a muffled
dirge.

And in the midst, with faltering step, and pale and
anxious face,
In manacles, between two guards, a soldier had his
place.
A youth—led out to die;—and yet, it was not death,
but shame,
That smote his gallant heart with dread, and shook
his manly frame!

Still on, before the marshalled ranks, the train
pursued its way
Up to the designated spot, whereon a coffin
lay—
His coffin! And, with reeling brain, despairing—
desolate—
He took his station by its side, abandoned to his
fate!

Then came across his wavering sight strange
pictures in the air:—

He saw his distant mountain home; he saw his
parents there;

He saw them bowed with hopeless grief, through
fast-declining years;

He saw a nameless grave; and then, the vision
closed—in tears!

Yet, once again. In double file, advancing, then,
he saw

Twelve comrades, sternly set apart to execute the
law—

But saw no more:—his senses swam—deep dark-
ness settled round—

And, shuddering, he awaited now the fatal volley's
sound!

Then suddenly was heard the noise of steeds and
wheels approach,—

And, rolling through a cloud of dust, appeared a
stately coach.

On, past the guards, and through the field, its
 rapid course was bent,
Till, halting, 'mid the lines was seen the nation's
 President!

He came to save that stricken soul, now waking
 from despair;
And from a thousand voices rose a shout which
 rent the air!
The pardoned soldier understood the tones of
 jubilee,
And, bounding from his fetters, blessed the hand
 that made him free!

'Twas Spring.—Within a verdant vale, where
 Warwick's crystal tide
Reflected, o'er its peaceful breast, fair fields on
 either side—

Where birds and flowers combined to cheer a
sylvan solitude—

Two threatening armies, face to face, in fierce
defiance stood !

Two threatening armies ! One invoked by injured
Liberty—

Which bore above its patriot ranks the Symbol of
the Free ;

And one, a rebel horde, beneath a flaunting flag
of bars,

A fragment, torn by traitorous hands, from Free-
dom's Stripes and Stars !

A sudden burst of smoke and flame, from many a
thundering gun,

Proclaimed, along the echoing hills, the conflict had
begun ;

While shot and shell, athwart the stream with
fiendish fury sped,

To strew among the living lines, the dying and the
dead !

Then, louder than the roaring storm, pealed forth
the stern command,
“Charge ! soldiers, charge !” and, at the word, with
shouts, a fearless band,
Two hundred heroes from Vermont, rushed onward,
through the flood,
And upward, o’er the rising ground, they marked
their way in blood !

The smitten foe before them fled, in terror, from
his post—
While, unsustained, two hundred stood, to battle
with a host !
Then, turning, as the rallying ranks, with murder-
ous fire, replied,
They bore the fallen o’er the field, and through the
purple tide !

The fallen ! And the first who fell in that unequal
strife,
Was he whom Mercy sped to save when Justice
claimed his life—

The pardoned soldier! And, while yet the conflict
raged around—

While yet his life-blood ebbed away through every
gaping wound—

While yet his voice grew tremulous, and death
bedimmed his eye—

He called his comrades to attest, he had not feared
to die!

And, in his last expiring breath, a prayer to heaven
was sent—

That God, with His unfailing grace, would bless
our President!

THE END.










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